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WORLD-POLITICS.

LONDON : PARIS.

LONDON, *November, 1906.*

Books and soap have been the preoccupation of England during the past month; books, because of the fight between "The Times" and the publishers, and soap, because of the combine formed by its leading manufacturers.

As a bait to subscribers, "The Times" started last year a Book Club. It wished to increase its circulation and its revenue from advertisements, both of them matters of some difficulty for a six-cent paper competing with two-cent and one-cent rivals. But, by throwing in a circulating library with the journal, as a grocer throws in a lithograph with his pound of tea, "The Times" justly counted on a large extension of its clientele. You pay a year's subscription to "The Times"—something just under twenty dollars—and without any extra expense you become at once entitled to all the privileges of the Book Club. Those privileges are very great. "The Times" has made its Book Club incomparably the best organization of the kind that has ever been seen in England. Take my own experience. I am entitled to get from the Book Club three books a week. They are delivered at my house regularly every Thursday, and the carrier takes away with him the supply of the previous week. The books are as clean and fresh-looking as though they had just come from the publishers. I have never yet been kept waiting for a book. Those who were subscribers to the journal found themselves, without paying out a single penny, members of the most generous, up-to-date and competent Book Club in the world. Those who were not subscribers hastened to become so. To the number of ninety thousand they rushed in; the Book Club nearly burst its premises on Bond Street; a huge emporium had to be

opened on Oxford Street; the book trade underwent a sudden revival; and for a while authors, publishers, "The Times" and the subscribers were equally jubilant.

But lending books was only one of the functions of the Book Club; it was far more important to its interests to sell them. Only so could it hope to become in any sense a self-supporting institution. A few years ago there was a crisis in the English bookselling trade. The discount system had practically killed it, and booksellers were taking to stocking tobacco and photograph-frames and so on. A remedy was found in the Net-book Agreement of 1899. By it the booksellers agreed not to sell net books below the published price, and the publishers agreed to refuse to supply books to any bookseller infringing this rule. "The Times" Book Club notified its adhesion to this agreement, and in the letter, at any rate, it has observed it. That is to say, it has sold no new net book below the published price. But, in a library, a book ceases to be new after it has once passed into circulation. A book that has gone through two subscribers' hands in the first week of its existence may be as good as new, but as a matter of fact it is not new. No bookseller would accept it if it were offered to him as a new copy by a publisher. Yet, for the purposes of the ordinary reading man, its condition and appearance may be perfectly satisfactory. "The Times" Book Club saw the value of the distinction between absolutely new and new enough. You cannot go into the Book Club and buy an absolutely new net book below the published price. But you can buy copies that have only been in circulation a week, a fortnight or one or two months at very considerable discounts. The ordinary booksellers at once began to clamor for protection. They brought pressure to bear on the publishers, who, having to choose between their largest customer and a multitude of smaller ones, sought safety in numbers and yielded to the clamor. The Net-book Agreement of 1899 was so amended as to prohibit the sale of a net book below published price within six months of publication. "The Times" declined to accept the amendment. The publishers retaliated by withdrawing all their advertisements from "The Times" and by refusing to allow the Book Club trade terms.

And there the quarrel hangs, with both sides appealing to the public for sympathy and support. An infinity of branch issues

has sprung from it, and the public explores them all with palpable relish. Do publishers make exorbitant profits? Will "The Times," if it is allowed a free hand, end by ruining itself or the booksellers? Are booksellers a necessity, anyway? Why should the Book Club, which is not a genuine library or a genuine bookseller, but has merely entered those walks in order to double the circulation of "The Times," be permitted to undersell and destroy the legitimate bookseller, who has no other means of making a living, and whose business is his sole source of income? And then, of course, the fiscal aspects of the question receive notice. Are the publishers fighting for what is in effect a close monopolistic ring, while "The Times" champions the cause of free trade in books? Or is it the other way about? Or doesn't the question possess a fiscal aspect? Both sides, I need hardly say, fling at each other's head the charge of being a Trust—"The Times" for the distribution, and the publishers for the production, of books. Problems of enormous intricacy arise as the discussion proceeds. Are books too dear? On which side of the dispute do the interests of authors lie? From the standpoint of literature, is it better that "The Times" should win or lose? But you may imagine the endless offshoots of such a controversy, and the more readily as the great fight between the publishers and the department stores in America covered very much the same ground. I think that opinion generally is on the side of "The Times." The subscribers to the Book Club are firmly supporting it, and are heroically refusing to ask for the books that bear the imprint of publishers who have been foremost in the attack. Neither side as yet shows any sign of yielding. But I think that, before the Christmas trade grows brisk, a compromise of some sort will be reached. An agreement that no net book shall be sold below the published price within, say, two or three months of publication seems the obvious and equitable arrangement.

As for the other matter which has agitated opinion here during the last few weeks—the formation of the so-called Soap Trust—I doubt whether any incident could have illuminated more clearly certain peculiarities of the British character and of British economics. Certain soap-making firms, with a capital of about \$60,000,000, have entered into a combination in order to get rid of the needless waste of unfettered competition. To call this combination a Trust seems to me a misnomer. It includes

most but by no means all of British manufacturers; there are enough firms left outside to put up a stern fight, if any fighting is found necessary. Nor does the Soap Trust aim at controlling the ingredients used in the manufacture of soap. An attempt to "corner" oils, tallow and the other alkaline bodies would be even more hopeless than an attempt to "corner" wheat. Nor, while it may amalgamate many interests, is there, so far as I can see, any chance of its being able to monopolize the distribution of the completed article. Free Trade is a mighty bulwark against extortion, and to form a Trust that would really dominate the English market it would be necessary, not only to combine the majority of English manufacturers, but also to control their American and Continental rivals, as well as the main sources of production. This is not, of course, physically impossible; but it is an enterprise of such appalling difficulty, and success in it is a matter of such extreme hazard, that it is hardly worth undertaking. The English public, once aroused, is quick to act and to defend itself. The Soap Trust began by attempting to sell a fifteen-ounce bar of soap for the same price as a sixteen-ounce bar. There was such an instantaneous roar of indignation, such a gathering in arms of all the retail grocers throughout the kingdom, such an immediate and persistent boycott of all the Trust's soaps, that the manœuvre was not only checked and exposed, but was officially disavowed.

The news of Sir Mortimer Durand's retirement, not merely from the British Embassy at Washington, but from the diplomatic service, was expected by very few people. It has left the general public surprised and puzzled. There being no reason on the surface to account for the resignation of an Ambassador who is still only in his fifty-sixth year, people have been inclined to ascribe it to some political disagreement, hitherto unrevealed. The "Morning Post," for instance, hinted that Sir Mortimer preferred throwing up his office to putting his signature to any treaty or compact framed along the lines of the Newfoundland *modus vivendi*. I do not know how that may be, but to any one who is aware of the strength of Sir Mortimer's Imperialism the supposition is not unreasonable. It is possible, also, that opinion in Downing Street has been somewhat poisoned against Sir Mortimer. The solid worth of the man, his deep acquaintance with American history and politics, his insight into the American

character, and his unfailing coolness, competency and dignity when confronted by serious business may have carried less weight with some people—for instance, with British tourists, Parliamentary and otherwise—than a certain stiffness and reserve in his social deportment.

Politics since I last wrote have shifted their centre of gravity from the House of Commons to the House of Lords. Their lordships have been considering the Education Bill to some purpose. It was never very lucid; they have made it chaotic. It insured the supremacy of popular control over national education; they have reestablished in its most aggressive form the tyranny of denominationalism. By amendment after amendment they have vitiated the principles and destroyed the purpose of Mr. Birrell's Bill, and have sought to reimpose upon the country a system even more favorable to the Established Church than was the Education Act of 1902. Of course, the Lords' amendments will not be accepted. Speaking officially on November 13th, as the Minister in charge of the Bill, Mr. Birrell declared that "a Liberal Government had no use for such a measure" as the Lords are piecing together. That unquestionably is so, and unless the Lords agree under pressure to abandon all the important amendments they have incorporated into the Government's Bill, a conflict between the two Houses, that may not end until it has strained the British Constitution, will have been begun. That the Lords are bracing themselves to reject compromise may be gathered from the action of the Conservative party in allowing the Trades Disputes Bill to pass its third reading in the House of Commons without a division. The meaning of that is that the Conservatives feel they cannot simultaneously engage both the Labor party and the Nonconformists. The Lords will probably follow Mr. Balfour's example, allow the Trades Disputes Bill to pass almost unaltered, and, having thus conciliated Labor, will feel free to throw their whole strength into the Education fight. I dare not prophesy what the result will be; but I am persuaded that, unless the Lords climb down, the complete secularization of English education may be much nearer than is thought. Mr. Birrell's Bill gives the Church of England the last chance it is likely to have. To reject it, or to refuse to withdraw the amendments that have, as a matter of fact, devitalized it, is to invite a very summary retribution.

PARIS, November, 1906.

I AM not quite sure that the endless talk about the separation of Church and State is very exciting for foreigners. But to the Frenchman, nothing exceeds the interest of the Religious War.

During the three weeks which preceded the publication of the Pope's encyclical, France was held breathless by two enigmas of apparently equal magnitude: Will the Pope give in, or will he resist? Is Joseph Delarue lying murdered at the bottom of some stone-pit, or has he eloped with the schoolmistress? When the Pope had "spoken," as the phrase went, and the newspaper readers had recovered from their surprise, the other question arose: "What will Clémenceau do now?"

It is notable that the Pope's decision is not political, but dogmatic. This ought to be clearly understood by anybody who wishes to take a correct view of the state of affairs. As I explained in a previous letter, the main object of the Separation Law was to substitute Associations of lay people for individual ecclesiastics in the necessary intercourse between the State and the Church. These Associations, according to Article IV of the Law, were to be in keeping with the general rules of the Church, that is to say, were to be dependent on, and not rebellious against, the Bishops. But Article VIII says that, in case of conflict between two Associations, the decision shall be left to the Council of State. This is the point to which the Pope objects.

I have not the least doubt that monastic and monarchist influences of a mischievous tendency were brought to bear on the Pope's judgment. It seems plain to me that the Council of State was bound by Article IV to refer to the Bishops in cases of difficulties, and consequently there was no danger of partial schisms from episcopal authority. But the Pope was almost certainly actuated by a distrust for which, not the present Government, but M. Combes, is responsible. The reader must remember how the Association Law passed in 1901 by M. Waldeck-Rousseau—to be, as he said, a Charter for the authorized religious Orders—was turned against them by the Combes Cabinet, and resulted in the general expulsion of all Orders and the confiscation of their property. The Pope dreaded some such abuse of a legal text, and his diffidence exaggerated for him the danger of civic interference in matters ecclesiastical. The position of Pius X is pretty clear. He merely declines to avail himself of a

law which, on the whole, is advantageous to the Church, until he is satisfied by an official statement of the French Parliament that there is no snare hidden under Article VIII of the Law.

One may regret this attitude. Certainly, the majority of the French Bishops must have regretted it, considering their vote in favor of a totally different one. By holding thus aloof, the Pope prevents the legal transference of the Church property, thus far in the hands of the Vestry Boards (over \$50,000,000), and renders doubtful even the right of priests to retain their churches; he practically starves the French clergy, and, to a certain extent, endangers the Church of France. It is sacrificing much to a principle which perhaps is not in jeopardy. But if this course can be regretted, there is no reason for calling it, as the violent anti-clerical press does, "a rebellion," or, in the words of an English Catholic, in a well-known magazine, "a Papal aggression on France." There is no more obligation upon the Pope to take advantage of this law than there is for a French citizen to submit to the regulations concerning matrimony. One is a loser by dispensing with the presence of the registrar, but one is not a rebel.

Although the Pope seeks only to maintain what he regards as a prerogative of the Church, to decide in matters which concern nobody but herself, his action could not but have political consequences. The reactionary party, voiced by such papers as the "*Gaulois*," the "*Soleil*," the "*Croix*," etc., immediately enlarged on the embarrassments in which the Pope's interference was placing the French Government. In their opinion, this quiet "Nay" was the greatest victory achieved by the Papacy in the last forty years. The Government would be sure to seek its revenge in measures hurtful to itself—it would close the churches, and the populace, no matter how vaguely religious, would rise to reopen them; this revolution would probably lead to a Restoration, and the Edenic state of affairs prophesied by the monarchists would be inaugurated without any call on the royalist energies. On the other hand, the "*Lanterne*," and the radical press generally, contended that M. Clémenceau should not stop short of the most stringent measures, but ought to shut the churches as soon as the Law enabled him to do so, and turn the Bishops out of the country, as supporters and agents of a foreign monarch.

M. Clémenceau at once gave proofs of his usual presence of

mind. He affected to treat the matter very lightly, declared to as many journalists as chose to interview him that, in spite of the monarchists' hopes and efforts, not one church would be closed under his administration, and went away to Carlsbad in perfect serenity. Meanwhile, the moderate press, like the "*Figaro*," the "*Débats*" and the "*Temps*," were trying to devise schemes for satisfying the Pope without enraging the Chamber. Various plans had been proposed, when Pius X suddenly discouraged everybody by telling a reporter of the "*Gaulois*"—a mistake which proves his lack of acquaintance with the political parties in France—that he would accept no guarantee except from the Chamber itself. This put an end to the matter, and to wait became really the only course. There was not long to wait. The new Cabinet had hardly been formed, and it was still discussing its announcement to the country, when a solution was arrived at. The Law contained a clause to the effect that, should no Associations turn up to claim the Church property, this property would remain in abeyance for a year, after which it would be appropriated by the State or by Municipal Charities. This proviso offered the Cabinet an easy method of postponing a difficult solution. M. Briand and M. Clémenceau have decided that, until December 11th, 1907, things will remain *in statu quo*, the revenue of the Church property being employed *pro tem.* for the repairs of ecclesiastical buildings.

No minister, since the eventful days of Boulanger, has been so interesting, so amusing, so full of unexpected resources, so ready to play practical jokes on the public, so polite and disdainful as Clémenceau. I have said above how calmly he dealt with the first difficulties arising from the Pope's encyclical, but his conduct on that perplexing occasion was nothing to the brilliancy he displayed when intrusted with the formation of a Cabinet. He took it all so much as a matter of course. Nobody had ever been quite aware that honest M. Sarrien was First Minister, and the poor gentleman slipped out of office as quietly as he had entered it. As to M. Clémenceau, everybody, on the contrary, had looked upon him as the real Premier, and it was the most natural thing in the world to see him hustling about in quest of Ministers suitable to him. The practical difficulty was to find out a Foreign Minister, a Minister of Finance and a Minister of War, who would be agreeable to the Socialists—without

whose sixty or eighty votes no Cabinet can stand—and yet who would be flexible in the hands of the Master. M. Clémenceau began with a masterly stroke, which instantly won him the support of Jaurès. There had never been in this land of democracy anything like a Department of Labor. One was promptly produced, and M. Viviani, a distinguished Socialist of great promise, was nominated to it. There was some little trouble about the assignment of the Foreign Office. Every one knows M. Clémenceau's Anglophil tendency, the blunt common phrase being that "Clémenceau is sold to the English." Now, there is no doubt that the *entente cordiale* is becoming only slowly, though steadily, popular. The Socialist party lean evidently to the German side (Jaurès's paper was refloated three weeks ago by German assistance), and they would object to any too marked advance made to England. Yet M. Clémenceau wanted M. Pischon, a bosom friend of his, to whom the German press immediately took exception. It took M. Clémenceau two days—during which his communications to the journalists beat the best farce ever acted—to demonstrate to the country that his *protégé* was just the right man in the right place. All this time, he was promising his journalistic hearers "a surprise." The surprise was the appointment of General Picquart to the War Office, and this surprise was so stunning that, made as it was in the teeth of public opinion, the nomination elicited next to no comment. Finally, our finance was entrusted to M. Caillaux. M. Clémenceau would have been lucky if he could have retained M. Poincaré in that difficult post. I showed in my last letter how this very able and straightforward financier had owned to a deficit of nearly two hundred millions of francs, and what means he had suggested for balancing the Budget. Certainly the country did not like the prospect of fresh taxes, but the honesty and the evident capacity of the Minister gave courage to the timid; if the Exchequer was low, at least its condition and the means of improving it were clear. The Bourse undoubtedly trusted M. Poincaré. It would appear that this gentleman's prejudice in favor of plain statements and methods was not shared by his immediate fellow workers. When M. Clémenceau came to ask the continuation of his assistance, M. Poincaré not only refused it, but made public his reasons for doing so. The letter was clear and uninvolved, like everything which comes from the same

hand. It left no doubt that the Budget Committee, without whose concurrence a Minister of Finance is powerless, had no intention of supporting M. Poincaré in his work of restoration, but, on the contrary, favored methods closely akin to garbling and deceiving, which could avail only to blind those who were not aware of the real state of affairs.

The present situation may be summed up as follows:

M. Clémenceau appears more and more as a wonderfully clear-headed, strong-handed politician—one might say statesman, if there were not something histrionic and a *brusquerie* bespeaking caprice in his manner. He is almost nearer to a dictator than to a Premier, a great novelty in this country. Very few people like him, but many admire him, and he possesses undoubted magnetism. The programme he submitted to the Chamber on November 5th is reasonable and distinctly socialistic, giving special attention to Labor questions, the buying back of a railway, an old-age pension and an income tax, the suppression of courts-martial and various military reforms, and the suppression of capital punishment. This programme will be supported by the Socialists as well as the Radicals, and, excepting one item, cannot meet with much opposition. The danger for the Cabinet then must lie in the possibility of some unexpected freak of the Premier's and still more in the presence of M. Caillaux in the Cabinet. The latter gentleman has a wonderful gift of lending lucidity, interest and even charm to the most abstruse financial technicalities, but he is an artist in Budgets, not a matter-of-fact business man. It is an ominous fact that, in less than a week after his appointment and the statement that his Income-Tax Bill might affect the *rentes*, these securities lost two points. There is apparent political stability, but the fortune of France is, on the contrary, more unstable than it has ever been, and M. Clémenceau may turn out to be only an extraordinary builder of card houses.

Let me note, before concluding this communication, that a violent campaign is being carried on against the American Insurance Companies, by means of arguments which are likely to bring the rest of American securities into discredit. The exodus of French capital, which I noticed in my last letter, is evidently responsible for this.